

EXTENSION OF FUNDING TO PROCESS PERMITS

Mr. YOUNG of Alaska. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 6316) to extend through December 31, 2008, the authority of the Secretary of the Army to accept and expend funds contributed by non-Federal public entities to expedite the processing of permits.

The Clerk read as follows:

H.R. 6316

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. FUNDING TO PROCESS PERMITS.

Section 214(c) of the Water Resources Development Act of 2000 (33 U.S.C. 2201 note; 114 Stat. 2594; 117 Stat. 1836; 119 Stat. 2169; 120 Stat. 318) is amended by striking "December 31, 2006" and inserting "December 31, 2008".

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Alaska (Mr. YOUNG) and the gentlewoman from Texas (Ms. EDDIE BERNICE JOHNSON) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Alaska.

Mr. YOUNG of Alaska. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of H.R. 6316, to authorize the extension of the Army Corps of Engineers' section 214 program.

Section 214 of the Water Resources Development Act of 2000 allows the Army Corps of Engineers to accept and expend funds provided by non-Federal public entities to hire additional personnel to process regulatory permits.

Mr. Speaker, H.R. 6316 is urgently needed since authority for this program expires on December 31 of this calendar year. If this program expires, the Corps will have to fire some regulatory personnel, reducing its ability to process permits in a timely manner.

The Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure has heard from Members on both sides of the aisle supporting the section 214 program. H.R. 6316 is nearly identical to section 2003 of the Water Resources Development Act of 2005, which passed the House on July 14, 2005 by a vote of 406-14. Since the authority for the section 214 program is expiring, it is necessary to move this piece separately.

I thank Representative BAIRD and our colleagues from the western United States for introducing this bill. I urge all Members to vote in favor of H.R. 6316.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Ms. EDDIE BERNICE JOHNSON of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

I support the passage of H.R. 6316. This bill extends through December 31, 2008, the authority of the Secretary of the Army to accept and expend funds contributed by non-Federal public entities to process permits under the Clean Water Act and the Rivers and Harbor Act of 1899.

The current authority for this program expires on December 31 of this

year. The program is popular and well-received, particularly in the northwest part of the country.

I congratulate my committee colleague Mr. BAIRD for his attention to this issue and for securing today's consideration of this bill. I can think of no other Member who has served his local or regional issues with more enthusiasm and effectiveness.

The language in H.R. 6316 is similar to the two previous extensions of this program which passed the House September 20, 2005, and March 14, 2006. Both of these votes to extend the program received strong support from the House.

The language in this legislation is modeled after the language contained in H.R. 2864, the Water Resources Development Act of 2005, which passed this House on July 14, 2005, by an overwhelming vote of 406-14.

While my preference would be to address the extension of this program through passage of the broader Water Resources Development Act, at this later hour in the session it seems increasingly unlikely that work can be completed on the larger bill.

This really is unfortunate because it only further delays the opportunity for the Corps of Engineers to provide essential flood control, navigation and ecosystem restoration projects to our Nation and vital public safety and economic benefits to our constituents.

We are now just one week shy of 6 years since the last water resources bill was enacted, and this is really far too long.

I am certain that there will be questions as to why Congress was unable to enact a water resources bill in the 109th Congress, especially since this is the first time since 2000 that both the House and Senate Chambers were able to approve legislation for the other body to consider.

However, in spite of this significant achievement and roughly 5 months of staff negotiations towards a conference agreement, the fact remains that no agreement has been reached, and we are days away from the adjournment and facing one more year without a water resources bill.

Mr. Speaker, the current administration has no commitment to the Nation's premier water-related infrastructure agencies. This administration fails to understand the importance of the Corps of Engineers and the vital work that this agency does for the American people.

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The administration's lack of support for a comprehensive Water Resources Development Act has only made Congress's work more difficult.

During the consideration in both the House and Senate, the administration released two statements of administration policy that were highly critical of the Congress's efforts, especially of the administration's concern with the overall cost of two bills. However, what

the administration fails to recognize is that the roughly \$10 billion project authorizations contained in this House-passed version and the \$12 billion in the Senate-passed version reflect 6 years of requests since the Water Resources Development Act of 2000. Should Congress fail to approve this Water Resources Development Act this year, we should expect that next year's bill will cost more than both the House and Senate versions, perhaps as much as \$15 billion. However, the Department of Transportation predicted it would be \$19 billion this year.

These numbers are consistent with the historical costs of past water resources bills, and further delay only results in making these vital projects more expensive over time. Yet Congress must also share the blame for its failure to deliver a comprehensive water resources bill this year. With both the House and Senate and the White House under Republican control, it would seem that passage of this legislation would have been achievable. In spite of these significant efforts of both the chairman of the conference committee and my chairman, Mr. YOUNG, the House and Senate has been unable to reach agreement on a final package. I am confident that our committee, under the leadership of our incoming chairman, Mr. OBERSTAR, will make the passage and enactment of the Water Resources Development Act a number one priority in 2007.

Mr. Speaker, I urge support of this bill and reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. YOUNG of Alaska. Mr. Speaker, I agree with the lady from Texas, her comments about the water resources bill. We passed it three times over to the other side of the aisle, and for three times they punted. And I think they have been kicking at the wrong goal, because we have not been able to finish this program.

This is a badly needed piece of legislation. The total bill itself has to be passed sooner or later, and it should be passed sooner; but it is not going to be. I expect to work with Mr. OBERSTAR and the chairman of the subcommittee; we were really thinking we would probably pass the bill that we have in conference today and go immediately to conference to get this done, and I will tell you that I will do everything in my power to work with the majority as the minority leader in trying to get this legislation passed. And, by the way, there are no dollars in the bill's authorization, but in the meantime we have things such as this bill we are talking about today that should have been passed previously that is going to expire.

And I would like to compliment Mr. BAIRD especially for his insistence on getting this bill on the floor, because it is crucial in the areas where we can continue and work is being done without the funding that should have been in the water bill that has passed by using a private donor or other sources of income to get the job done.

So I agree with the gentlewoman, and I do compliment Mr. BAIRD on his insistence of the legislation.

Madam Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Ms. EDDIE BERNICE JOHNSON of Texas. Madam Speaker, I yield such time as he may consume to the gentleman from Washington (Mr. BAIRD).

Mr. BAIRD. Madam Speaker, I thank the gentlewoman for yielding, and I thank my good friend, the chairman of the committee from Alaska, for his insight and leadership in bringing this to the floor.

As has been said, this legislation would extend section 214 of the Water Resources Development Act until December 31, 2008. It is a commonsense bill. It will save jobs, protect the environment, and promote economic growth.

Section 214 was enacted in WRDA 2000 to permit non-Federal public entities to contribute funds to the Army Corps to help expedite the processing of Corps permits. This is especially important in regions such as my own where we have endangered species listed and the permitting load has grown exponentially in recent years. This permission has allowed municipalities and ports to move forward with vital infrastructure projects, and these entities that provide funding are given no partiality by the Corps in their review of the project.

However, by funding additional staff to work on specific time-intensive permits, the staff and the Corps budget is freed up to work on their permit backlog. In fact, in utilizing this authority, the Army Corps of Seattle District has seen their total average review time per project reduced from 804 days to just 69 days in the first 3 years of implementation. And the City of Seattle alone estimates the cost savings at over \$5 million, again from a piece of legislation that does not cost the Federal Government a penny.

Additionally, due to urgent construction needs, thousands of Corps staff have volunteered to serve in the Katrina area as well as reconstruction areas in Iraq and Afghanistan. Again turning to the Seattle Corps as an example, they have deployed a total of 233 civilian and military staff, approximately 29 percent of their staff, to these areas. First, we appreciate the service of those staff members and their courageous work in those combat areas. At the same time, however, their departure has left a limited number of staff remaining to handle the needs of the regional area. The deployments of the soldiers and men and women serving overseas can range from 30 days to a year or more, again leaving a substantial gap. It is during such times of increased deployments and increased demand for permits that we need expedited processes such as 214, and they are vital in continuing regional growth and economic need.

This section, as was mentioned, was enacted last year unanimously as H.R.

4826, and currently is unfortunately set to expire on December 31. What we are seeking is simply an extension until the committee finishes their work on WRDA before the end of the 110th, and I share my colleague's frustration that in spite of the House, as my good friend from Alaska said, we passed it across the aisle. We are with you across the aisle; it is across the Capitol that we have got the problem with the other body, as we say.

This provision is absolutely vital to Corps activities. Although this authority exists for all regions in the country, it has been particularly utilized in the Pacific Northwest by the City of Seattle, Ports of Tacoma and Long Beach, as well as the City of San Diego and public entities in Florida as well and around Sacramento. In the Northwest we have seen the backlog in the past had grown to 1,000 permits per year, but we have been able to lower that thanks to this legislation.

I am pleased to have support of all Washington State House Members as cosponsors of the bills, as well as Members representing Oregon, Idaho, and California. Again, I would thank the chairman, Mr. YOUNG, Ranking Member OBERSTAR, Water Resource Subcommittee Chairman DUNCAN and Ranking Member JOHNSON, as well as their staff; and I look forward to working with them. Finally, let me give special thanks to my staff member Katie Stephens who is leaving my office this year but has worked diligently on this piece of legislation and has worked for me for several years and prior to that for Cal Dooley. I wish her all the best and I am grateful for her service.

Mr. HONDA. Madam Speaker, I rise today to express my support for H.R. 6316, and I am glad the House will be approving this bill today.

The bill extends the Army Corps of Engineers authority to accept and expend funds contributed by non-Federal public entities to expedite the processing of permits. If the House and Senate had been able to agree to the Water Resources Development Act, this authority would have been extended, but unfortunately the two bodies have been unable to pass WRDA yet again.

H.R. 6316 helps to address an increasingly important problem in areas that are experiencing significant growth in environmentally sensitive areas. In the Sacramento, CA region, for example, much of the land includes wetlands and endangered or threatened species, meaning that any construction projects require permits from the Corps of Engineers to proceed.

At current staffing levels, the Corps of Engineers cannot process the large number of permits in a timely manner. The authority granted by this bill allows the Corps to accept outside funds to support additional staff to work on the processing of these permits.

I would prefer that in the future we can address this problem permanently, either by giving the Corps of Engineers sufficient funding to do its job or by granting permanent authority similar to that in this bill; but in the interim, I am happy that we will be passing H.R. 6316 and I commend Representative BAIRD for pushing this bill forward.

Ms. EDDIE BERNICE JOHNSON of Texas. Madam Speaker, I have no other requests for time, and I yield the balance of the time.

Mr. YOUNG of Alaska. Madam Speaker, I have no other requests for time, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mrs. CAPITO). The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Alaska (Mr. YOUNG) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 6316.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds of those voting having responded in the affirmative) the rules were suspended and the bill was passed.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. YOUNG of Alaska. Madam Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that Members have 5 legislative days to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on House Resolution 1087 and H.R. 6316.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Alaska?

There was no objection.

SUPPORTING THE GOALS AND IDEALS OF NATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL SENIORS VOTER REGISTRATION DAY

Mr. EHLERS. Madam Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and agree to the concurrent resolution (H. Con. Res. 73) supporting the goals and ideals of National High School Seniors Voter Registration Day.

The Clerk read as follows:

H. CON. RES. 73

Whereas in order for the government of the United States to remain of the people, by the people, and for the people, individuals must take advantage of their right to vote;

Whereas the right to vote is one of the most important rights of a citizen, and every effort should be made to promote voter registration at school so that students may begin participating in the foundation of the Nation's representative democracy;

Whereas the Legislature of Louisiana voted in 2002 to recognize annually the first Tuesday in May as National High School Seniors Voter Registration Day; and

Whereas the purpose of National High School Seniors Voter Registration Day is to allow students to register to vote at school to encourage their participation in making democracy work: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved by the House of Representatives (the Senate concurring), That Congress supports the goals and ideals of National High School Seniors Voter Registration Day, and encourages all eligible students to register to vote.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. EHLERS) and the gentlewoman from California (Ms. MILLENDER-MCDONALD) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Michigan.

Mr. EHLERS. Madam Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.